

Until I Found You

by Lady Callista

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Summary: Killian Jones had come to the small town of Storybrooke for some peace and quiet, and atmosphere, for his latest screenplay. He hadn't expected to fall for Emma Swan, his temporary landlady, who clearly wasn't looking for love. But he knows better than anyone that just because you aren't looking for something doesn't mean it won't find you. (modern AU, CS)

## 1. Chapter 1

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AN: I'm normally not a fan of AU, but it works so fantastically well in OUAT. I've read many amazing ones and just had to try my own hand at it. Reviews and constructive criticism more than welcome, as it's my first AU in a very long time, and my first in OUAT. CS as always, but with lots of other familiar characters as well. For those of you reading Stars, no worries, I haven't forgotten about this. But the idea for this story has been on the backburner for a long time, and I finally had to write it. They will both get my attention, I promise.

\* \* \*

><p><span>Until I Found You<span>

by Lady Callista

\_OoOoOoO\_

\_"I had been badly hurt before. \_

\_Ever since then, I would ignore any chance for love. \_

\_I thought it was a lie."\_

\_OoOoOoO\_

Chapter 1:

"We're gonna miss our flight if she doesn't hurry." Ruby huffed as she loaded her suitcase into the back of her car, automatically checking that the plane tickets were in the pouch of the carry-on before she tucked it into the corner, leaving room for Granny's suitcase.

Emma chuckled as her friend brushed at her bangs in annoyance. "You make sure you've got everything, I'll go get her."

"Emma... she wants to go, right? I mean I know she'd do it for me in any case, but..."

"She wants to go, Ruby, and what's more you said she hasn't taken a vacation in twenty years." Emma grinned as she jogged back up the front steps of the home Ruby had grown up in. For the past twenty years, it had also been a Bed and Breakfast. "She's just nervous about leaving, once you guys are on the beach she'll have a blast."

"We should have picked somewhere other than the beach."

Emma stopped with her hand on the door, turning at the sudden morose tone in her friend's voice. And could have kicked herself, remembering how the last time Ruby had been on a beach she'd been with her. And so had Mary Margaret, and David, and a few of their other friends. So had Peter.

She knew what that was like, how some comment or thought would bring on a memory just when you finally thought you'd begun to move on. And Ruby's loss was much more recent than her own. "I know you're sick of hearing this, Red, but it just takes time. Take it from someone who knows."

"Cause you've moved on so well, Blondie." Emma took a deep breath, but before the barb could even fully register, Ruby was rushing up the porch to clasp her hands. "I'm sorry, Ems I'm so sorry, I just..."

"It's okay." Emma said softly, "I didn't mean you should find some hunk and have a wild affair, I just meant give yourself permission to be happy. Take the time to be with Granny, you're so lucky to have her."

"I know." Ruby reached around Emma to push the front door open, calling in an increasingly louder voice, "But if she doesn't get a move on I'm leaving her behind."

"Oh, hold your horses, girl, I'll be out in a minute. You can come get my suitcase if you want."

Emma grinned as Granny just yelled back, her voice calm and sweet, and turned to tell Ruby, "I'll get it, I'm sure she has a dozen

things to remind me of again and it'll be faster if she starts now." She tossed Ruby a wink, surprised when her friend grabbed her hand as she turned away. "What?"

"You're allowed to be happy too, you know."

"I am happy." Emma smiled, and in a way, it really was true. She'd only been in Storybrooke, only known Ruby and everyone else for just over a year, and while it certainly wasn't the life she'd expected, it was the closest she'd ever come to feeling at home.

"You know what I mean." Ruby said softly.

Emma nodded, but only gripped her friends hands for a second before turning and jogging through the house to the rooms Granny kept off the kitchen for herself.

"Are you sure you can manage this, honey?" Granny asked the second Emma walked through her door.

"For the hundredth time, yes." Emma sighed as she picked up Granny's jacket from where it hung over a chair and helped the woman into it.

"Cause I could just stay for a few days, and then you or Mary Margaret could fly down, or..."

"Granny, she's had her time with us." Emma said softly, "And we understand her wanting to get away for a bit. Sometimes you just need to get away."

The accident, only a few months ago, still haunted her memories every time she drove down the road north of town towards the forest, and she hadn't been in the middle of it like Ruby had, she'd only seen the aftermath. And she'd lost a friend, whereas Ruby had lost a fiancé.

"I just can't stand to see her how she's been the past few months." Granny whispered.

"I know." Emma murmured back. "You know it just takes time, and we're all doing what we can for her. But she needs this right now, and..." She heard Ruby's shoes hit the tile behind her on the way through the house and hurried to raise her voice, "And you know I'll be fine for two weeks. I can do this."

"I know you can, dear." Granny paused in the act of pulling on her gloves to give Emma a quick hug. She was one of the few people in town who knew just how well Emma understood. "It's not like we're very busy this time of year, the only reservation while I'm gone is Killi..."

"Killian Jones, I know." Emma grinned as she bent down to pick up Granny's suitcase. "He's a screenwriter who just needs a few months peace and quiet to finish a script."

"But he wants both room and board, and..."

"Granny, I know." Emma grinned as she slung her arm around the woman's shoulders and pulled her from the room. She loved the woman

who had helped her out when she first came to town, she really did, but Ruby needed her more than the inn did at the moment. "You're the one that taught me to cook, well, stuff for guests anyway. Trust that you did a good job."

"Oh, it's not just that, but with only having the one guest, well, you'll be alone with a man we don't know, and..."

"You do it all the time, and in 20 years you've had what, three problems? Four? People don't come to little towns in the middle of nowhere to be idiots." Emma reminded her.

"I know, I know." Granny said as they moved down the front steps, "It's just, remember that a few years back all the tabloids were saying..."

"It's been almost five years, Granny, and it was ruled an accident." Ruby shook her head as she cut Granny off. "I saw you online, checking up on him since Emma would be alone with him, and other than having a reputation as a bit of a lady's man he's well respected in the industry."

"And we all know I can handle a Romeo." Emma flashed back briefly to a guest they'd had a few months ago, a guy named Walsh who had been sweet enough at first Emma had actually gone on a date with him, the only date she'd been on in the past year. And it had been fantastic, until he'd dropped her off at her apartment and wanted so much more than a kiss goodnight. When he'd tried to force the issue she'd put him down with first an elbow and then a knee. By the time David and Mary Margaret came down from their apartment upstairs, worried by the crash they'd heard, all that had been left for David to do was shove him out the front door.

"And if we don't get going, we won't get to Portland in time to make our flight." Ruby added as she jingled her keys.

"Besides, when did you start believing tabloids?" Emma asked as she loaded Granny's suitcase into the car and closed the trunk. "Or start judging people for their pasts?"

It took a few more minutes and more cajoling, but Emma and Red were well used to that with Granny, and then there was the round of goodbyes, but eventually the two Lucas's were off.

Emma wandered back into the house, the home, that was hers for the next two weeks. It was somewhat fitting, as it was the closest thing to a home she'd ever had. At least in the past 10 years. She'd taken a room here when she first moved into town, not that there was another option than this small inn about a mile out of town. In theory, it was Lucas Manor, but everyone in town called it Granny's. Not to be confused with her restaurant in town, which did actually bear that name.

Emma had hit it off with Ruby right away, and been basically adopted by Granny, which apparently wasn't uncommon when 'strays' came to town. There was a reason the whole town called her granny, after all.

She'd put in nearly as many hours working here over the past year as she had as a deputy, since she was only needed part time there. Her

and Ruby had even run the inn, when all five rooms were full, for nearly a week when Granny had a nasty bout with pneumonia.

She knew she could do it, even if it wasn't her ideal job, but she still had to take a deep breath as she closed the front door behind her, looking around the family room. She knew the trust that Granny was placing in her, and there was no way she was going to let her down.

But her only guest didn't arrive until tomorrow afternoon, and so until one Killian Jones showed up Emma didn't have to start being an innkeeper or hostess. She knew Granny had spent the afternoon cleaning and getting his room ready, and she was on leave from the department to watch over the bed and breakfast. Which meant she had a night with nothing to do.

Emma decided to take advantage of the somewhat rare occurrence, changing into comfortable flannel pants and a tank top before wandering into the kitchen. Ruby and Granny had already eaten when she drove out after work, and she'd immediately begun alternating between listening to Granny repeat instructions she had memorized and helping her friend move Granny along. But she knew Granny, and grinned as she pulled out an individually wrapped serving of lasagna, turning the oven on to warm it and wondering if Granny would somehow know if she brought over her microwave for the next two weeks. The older woman hated them, and refused to have one in the house, despite how much easier it would make parts of her job. It wasn't that she was opposed to technology, the house had wifi and Granny updated the inn's Facebook page herself, but there was just something about microwaves.

Shaking her head at the eccentricity, she wandered back into the living room, starting a fire in the deep marble fireplace because she'd always loved it. Then she pulled up Netflix and scanned Granny's list, remembering that she'd been searching for movies by the screenwriter who was coming to stay. When the food was ready, she grabbed a glass of wine and settled in to see what kind of writer her future guest was.

OoOoOoOoOoO

He should have stayed in Portland.

The thought had been running through Killian's mind for the past hour as he navigated the dark country roads at a crawl, the combination of wind and rain keeping him from being able to see more than ten feet in front of him. What should have been a three hour drive had already taken nearly five.

He'd passed the road into Storybrooke nearly a mile ago, and wondered now if he shouldn't just go back and find an open bar. Surely someone would know of somewhere he could stay, because clearly he wasn't going to be finding Lucas Manor in this deluge.

He should have just stayed in Portland for the night as he'd planned, but he'd been strangely awake despite the time zone change from Ireland and desperately wanted to get out of the city. He could write anywhere and generally did, traveling the country and using where ever he ended up as inspiration.

He'd chosen Storybrooke in particular for his own reasons, but the pictures he'd seen of it had indeed shown him a small, quaint New England town, which was the setting he'd wanted for the murder mystery he was working on.

Killian had just decided to turn around when his headlights caught a large wooden sign sitting next to what he was fairly certain was a driveway. It was on the right and just over a mile past town, as he'd been told, but even though he could tell there was a light on the sign, it was unreadable through the storm.

He turned in carefully, following the gravel drive for nearly a quarter of a mile before, to his relief, he saw both a car and a house. He pulled his rental car in next to the old, bright yellow bug, already writing a backstory for it in his head.

It looked to be from the 60's, or maybe the early 70's and he imagined the elderly woman he'd spoken to on the phone and what she was like 50 years ago. Probably a hippie, driving the country with her friends, following bands and spreading free love and pot.

Despite the miserable drive and the fact that he was about to get very wet, the image made him smile. It might be dead on or completely off, but that was the joy of being a writer. The world could be whatever he wanted it to be, whatever he could dream of making it. If only real life worked that way.

Still grinning at the idea of his landlady in bell-bottoms and love beads, flowers in her hair, he pulled his overnight bag from the seat next to him. Everything else could wait in the trunk until Zeus got over his little tantrum.

There were no lights on in the house that he could see as he jogged to it, and he hoped Mrs. Lucas wouldn't be too upset at being pulled from her bed for an early guest. It was barely 11pm, yet he'd stayed at enough B&B's over the years to know how differently they ran from hotels. He preferred them actually, except at moments like this.

He doubted a knock would be heard over the thunder, and to his relief he found the door unlocked. If it hadn't been for the storm he wouldn't have gone in, but it was an inn after all, hopefully a late night guest wouldn't scare his landlady too badly.

He froze just inside the door, his first thought that somehow he was in the wrong place.

Lucas Manor was supposed to be the only house in the area, yet this looked simply like a home. Again, like the unlocked door, not uncommon with a B&B, but the blonde curled up on the couch, sound asleep under a throw, definitely wasn't his landlady, and there had been no cars to indicate another guest.

An empty plate and half a glass of wine sat on the floor at her feet, a fire burned low in the hearth and the credits to something rolled on the TV along with soft music, but he noticed the details only absently, struck by the beauty of the girl who looked to be roughly his age. He was just about to back out, seriously concerned he was somehow in the wrong house, when the wind whipped shut the door he'd left open in his concern.

She startled awake, sitting up at once, and he watched her eyes do a quick scan of the room before finding him by the door. "Can I help you?"

She sounded curious but not scared, which made him wonder if he had the right place after all. "I'm looking for Lucas Manor, but I'm thinking maybe I've gotten a bit lost."

"Nope, you're found." Emma replied, rubbing at her eyes as she tried to make her brain work faster. The man was barely more than a tall, shapeless shadow against the door, but his posture was non-threatening and his voice carried an accent that immediately made her think of the British lead in the romantic comedy she'd fallen asleep watching. She reached behind her to flick on a lamp, and seeing the remains of her dinner on the floor made her realize why he thought he had the wrong house. A guest wouldn't be sleeping in the living room of a B&B with dirty dishes on the floor.

And that thought made her realize that he was probably looking for a room for the night, and she rose hurriedly even as she looked back up at him and froze. He'd moved forward at some point while she was trying to wake up fully, and her first thought was that he didn't just sound like the hot lead from the movie, he looked like him as well.

He was, quite simply, one of the most attractive men she had ever seen. She couldn't make out much of his body under the leather trench that swirled around his knees, but her first thought on seeing his face was that he should be an actor and not a writer. His cheekbones were well defined, as was the jawline covered in scruff. It looked natural on him and was clearly well-kept, and matched the solemn yet full lips. His eyes were the brightest blue she'd ever seen, showing both curiosity and male interest that immediately made heat flush through her. His dark hair was plastered to his head, and she realized belatedly that he was dripping all over the carpet.

"You picked a bad night to travel." Emma broke herself out of her trance and hurried to the fire, tossing on more wood before rising to face him, cursing the blush that rose to her cheeks as he only grinned at the random statement, the twinkle in his eyes clearly showing he'd noticed her checking him out. Yet to her surprise and his credit, his eyes stayed on her face, despite the fact that she was bra-less under her thin tank top.

"I discovered that, lass." Killian took the fire as invitation, and moved towards it as he pulled his coat off. "My apologies for waking you, and I'll extend the same to Mrs. Lucas, but she's expecting me. Although not, I'm afraid, until tomorrow."

"Mr. Jones?" Emma questioned even as she took his coat automatically, moving by him to hang it on one of the many hooks by the door and grabbing a black sweater from one of them and sliding her arms into it before pulling up the zipper.

"Killian." He said automatically, eyes following her with interest as he held his hands up to the fire, grateful for the warmth after the dash through the freezing rain. She was beautiful, all slim lines and long hair, green eyes flashing with intelligence now that the sleep was mostly gone from them.

She nodded, tilting her head curiously as he pulled off his right glove and moved his hand closer to the fire, but left the other glove in place. His eyes caught her attention again, sparkling in the firelight, and she reminded herself that early or not, he was a guest. "Gran...ah, Mrs. Lucas is actually out of town for the next few weeks, but yes, we were expecting you. I can make some coffee or tea if you like, or if you just want to go up to your room..."

"I've been dreaming of tea for the last hour," Killian admitted with a chuckle, "but I don't want you to trouble yourself..."

"All part of the service." Emma smiled, having fully transitioned in her head to what Granny called \_company mode. \_Her and Ruby just called it work mode, but whatever the name it was a mindset that she slipped into with both ease and relief. It made it easier to ignore the dimple in his one cheek, the same one with the barely noticeable scar. And the way his voice lilted over his words, his phrasing obviously completely natural to him while being just foreign enough to her to be oddly fascinating.

"Even for unexpected guests, Ms..."

He trailed off again, and Emma realized belatedly that his earlier comment had been trying to get her to introduce herself. "Sorry, Mr... Killian." She corrected herself when he raised an eyebrow. "And it's Swan, but that should never be combined with Ms. I'm Emma, and I'll try to be fully awake from now on."

His grin was quick and breathtaking, and he chuckled as he answered, "It is nearly the witching hour, Emma, and I can only apologize again for waking you. I promise now that I'm here I'll be a model guest. But if you meant it about the tea..."

"Of course." Emma smiled, taking a deep breath at the way his accent caressed over her name even as she noticed his eyes flick down to her bare left hand, "I'll show you to your room, I'm sure you want to get out of those wet clothes..." She stuttered as his grin flashed again. His coat had kept his shirt mostly dry, though the black dress shirt was tailored to show that his body was far from the shadowy blob she had first seen upon waking. His dark jeans were soaked through however, and she could see dark patches on the shoulders and chest of his shirt from where his hair was dripping. "I can bring your bags in..."

He chuckled, "You'll not be going out in that, lass, and neither will I." He moved past her to the front door, absently tucking his right glove into his jacket pocket before picking up his carry-on. "I can get the rest later."

Emma nodded, and crossed the living room to go up the stairs. She wondered why he had left his left glove on, but had enough manners that she'd never ask anyone about something like that, let alone a guest. He followed her up the two flights and down the hallway, nodding as he passed her when she opened a door and reached in to flick a light switch before gesturing for him to go through.

His first impression of the room was comfort and charm. The walls were a soft, relaxing green, enhancing the nature watercolors that decorated them. From the stunning and clearly handmade quilt on the



four poster king bed to the vase of buttercups on the matching oak dresser, and a scent of cinnamon and other spices that drew his gaze to a vase of potpourri on the nightstand, the room was a perfect example of why he preferred B&B's.

"This room and the other one on this floor both have doors to the bathroom, but that one's unoccupied at the moment. The doors can be locked from the inside or outside, from both rooms. We generally use it when we have families, but none of the rooms on the second floor have private baths, and since you're the only guest at the moment..."

"It's fine, lass. The room's lovely."

"Granny does a good job." Emma nodded towards the bathroom door. "There's soap and everything else you could need, and towels in the closet. I'll go put the kettle on, the kitchen is straight through the living room, or I can bring it up here if..."

"I'll be down in a few moments, if that's alright."

"Of course." Emma answered, "Just tea, or are you hungry as well?"

"This inn's reputation for hospitality is well deserved." Killian grinned as he ducked into the bathroom, blindly grabbing a towel to dry his hair. "Though at the moment just the tea sounds wonderful, although if perhaps it could be made a bit more Irish?"

Emma's grin flashed as she chuckled, and Killian's breath caught at the sight. She really was just as lovely as his first impression. "Whiskey or Baileys?"

"Your choice, love, if you'll join me for a cup."

His eyes twinkled at her, and Emma had to remind herself to breath. The last time she'd been this affected by a man's mere presence had been over ten years ago, and that certainly hadn't ended well. But Ruby's words about having fun echoed in her head, and it wasn't like she would have to risk her heart. He'd only be here for two months, that wasn't enough time for her heart to be broken again. And she couldn't deny that his eyes had sparked a heat in her that she'd never thought to feel again. "Whiskey it is."

His grin was all the answer she needed, and Emma nodded as she backed into the hallway, "Welcome to Storybrooke, Killian."

She closed the door behind her, and it took Killian a long moment to shake himself from his trance, setting his bag on the dresser and pulling out a set of dry clothes. He changed quickly, contemplating a shower but feeling the first surges of jet lag starting to set in. And he wanted a little more time with his fascinating and unexpected landlady.

He hadn't come here looking for anything but a quiet place to write, and maybe an opportunity to covertly collect some evidence or at least gain some knowledge. But he was intrigued by the quiet blonde. By Emma, don't call me Ms. Swan. She'd been sleepy at first, clearly trying to wake up and focus on a conversation, but even then she hadn't been alarmed by a strange man in the room with her.

He'd seen the alertness in her body language, but she'd been polite and clearly unconcerned with his presence. Either life in a small town had left her innocent of the possible danger, or she thought she could handle any problem he posed. The second thought was more appealing than he wanted to consider... honestly, Swan was more appealing in general than he wanted to consider, and he stroked his fingers absently over his right forearm, whispering Milah into the empty room before mentally shaking himself from his stupor and tossing his wet clothes into the bathtub before heading back downstairs, his thoughts turning once again to the intriguing Emma Swan.

She'd recovered quickly for someone roused from a sound sleep, and although he'd been intrigued by her blush at what he would barely consider flirting, he'd backed off quickly when he'd seen the spark of anxiousness in her eyes. He hadn't been able to help checking her hand, but if she was married she didn't wear a ring. Which didn't mean she wasn't involved with someone, but while Killian found it hard to believe such a beauty could be single in a small town, he found himself hoping she was. And feeling guilty that he didn't feel guilty about that.

Once again he absently stroked his fingers over the tattoo under his right sleeve before adjusting the cuff on his left to make sure it tucked into his glove as he entered the kitchen. "That smells bloody amazing, love."

"It's a special blend from Cafe Aurora, best coffeehouse in town. Decaf, with herbs designed to promote a healthy sleep." Emma quoted with a grin as he took a seat at the kitchen table and she reached up to pull the bottle of Jameson from the liquor cabinet. "There's a list in your room of all the town's restaurants, shops, coffeehouses, and the like. You also, as I'm sure Granny discussed, have the option of having any and all meals here."

"Thank you." He acknowledged as she handed him a cup of doctored tea. "I flew in from Ireland, and the time difference means that when I drop, I'm likely to do so for a while. May I request a time appropriate meal whenever I'm back on my feet and we'll go from there?"

"Sounds good." Emma acknowledged, taking a sip of her own tea. She loved this blend, and sometimes the whiskey she added was the only thing that allowed her to sleep. "I'm in the first room on the second floor if you need anything and can't find me around, or press one then pound on any of the house phones to ring all the others."

He nodded, and they sat for a few minutes, drinking their tea as she answered a few questions he had about the town. When he'd finished and said no to a refill, she rose to rinse out their mugs and he headed towards the archway to the living room and the stairs.

"I certainly can't say I mind, Swan, but I hope your granny was called away for fun and not an emergency."

"She's not my... everyone just calls her Granny." Emma explained as she turned out the kitchen lights and followed him up the stairs. Still, a flicker went through her that he'd cared enough to ask. "And let's just say it was a family thing."

He nodded as she made it clear it wasn't a topic for discussion, and smiled at her as she moved out of the staircase onto the second floor. "Thank you for the hospitality, and I'll see you tomorrow."

She nodded and they said goodnight before going to their rooms.

TBC...

\_Please let me know what you think? It's been a very long time since I've written something like this.\_

## 2. Chapter 2

Disclaimer: I do not in anyway own Once Upon A Time. ABC, Disney, A&E, and whoever else have that distinction. All opening chapter quotes are from "Till I Found You" by Freestyle. No profit is being made, and no copywrite infringement is intended.

AN: Wow, thanks so much for the fantastic reviews, I'm glad I got this off to a start that interested people. I'm going to be slowly introducing the other characters as the chapters go on, but there will always be more CS cuteness.

\* \* \*

><p><span>Until I Found You<span>

by Lady Callista

\_OoOoOoO\_

"I didn't need anybody else, that was what I would tell myself.

And I believed that that was how it would be."

\_OoOoOoO\_

Chapter 2:

It was nearly ten in the morning when Emma heard the rattle in the pipes that meant the third floor shower was on. She set aside the case-file she was going over once the shower turned off, making sure to tuck the folder into her backpack before heading into the kitchen. She had just opened the fridge, trying to decide if a late breakfast or an early lunch was the way to go, when she heard the front door open and her name called out.

"In the kitchen!" She called back even as she saw the jar with Granny's homemade waffle batter sitting prominently on the front of the top shelf. She grabbed it with a grin just as Mary Margaret swirled into the kitchen with her baby son Leo. "Hey, what's up? I thought you had parent-teacher conferences all day."

"They don't start till noon." The teacher settled in at the table the same way she would at her own, the way she always had at Granny's.

Emma smiled, remembering how long it had taken her to get used to that when she first moved here. Not only did no one lock their doors, but at Granny's no one even bothered to knock. Partially due to it being an inn, Emma knew, but also because Granny always had an ear and sensible advice for the troubled. Or for good gossip. "Taking Leo out to the farm?" She asked, referencing David's mother's place, which was another mile or so down the road.

"Well, that was the plan, but Ruth's got the flu. And I was halfway here before I remembered that Granny left last night, cause she'll always watch him if..."

Her friend trailed off, but Emma knew where she was going with this. She'd come here even once she remembered Granny was gone, meaning she was hoping that Emma could watch the baby. It wasn't like she had anything else to do, other than feed her guest if he ever came down, but even though Leo was nearly four months old and she'd watched him before for brief periods, Emma was still slightly uncomfortable around babies. Not only had she never really been around them, but they reminded her of...

"Lass?"

Mary Margaret's eyes widened as the male voice called out from the living room, and her head snapped in Emma's direction. Before her friend could ask the question Emma saw forming, she lowered her voice and said, "My guest was early," before raising her voice and calling out her location.

"Good morning, oh... sorry to interrupt."

"Guests are never interrupting." Mary Margaret and Emma quoted one of Granny's adages in tandem before catching eyes and grinning.

Killian grinned back, and Emma made introductions before checking that fruit and waffles sounded good. He agreed easily, saying he'd unpack his trunk while she caught up with her friend, and turning down her offer of help. "It's mostly boxes of books, for reference, and they're rather on the heavy side."

Mary Margaret chuckled, shaking her head even as Emma turned slowly from the refrigerator to face him, her expression warning him to choose his next words carefully.

To the man's credit, he was quick to realize his misstep, and raised an eyebrow and grinned as he continued without missing a beat. "Of course what I mean is that I've had nothing but airplane food in the past day, and don't want to wait a moment longer than necessary for those waffles."

Emma couldn't help but chuckle as he winked at her, the humor clear in her voice as she responded, "Good answer. Tea?"

"Always, although it's probably best we leave the whiskey in the cabinet this time."

"Well, according to your body clock it should be about five o'clock." Emma responded without even thinking about it. He laughed, full out, and Emma had to catch her breath. She'd thought he was hot before,

but the pure amusement on his face made him even more attractive. And she had to stop thinking like that.

"Aye love, but that probably wouldn't help me adjust." He chuckled. "Anything I can do to help? Need any jars opened?"

"I think we're good." Emma couldn't help the smirk that rose to her lips as he made a joke of his earlier misstep, the way his eyes twinkled letting her know he didn't mean any harm by it. He thought he was being cute, and dammit if she wasn't charmed. "Although if I see any bugs I need squished I'll give you a scream."

Once again, his grin was fast and breathtaking as he chuckled. "Somehow I don't think you have any more difficulty with spiders than you do jars."

She blushed at the offhand and roundabout compliment before reminding herself that just because it started this way didn't mean it would last. "It'll be ready in about ten minutes, if that's enough time for you to unload." Emma hated the stiffness in her voice, but it was an automatic defense against the attraction. She was going to be basically alone with him for two weeks, and while she'd joked with Ruby about having fun there was a difference between having fun and risking her heart. There was a seriousness about him, a watchfulness behind the sparkle in his eyes, that told her he wasn't just looking for a few weeks of fun. And something in his eyes made her worry that he saw way more than she let anyone see.

"I'll at least get it all in from the car, as it looks like it's about to start pouring again." As it had the night before, what he already thought of as her innkeeper mask came crashing down, and he retreated just as easily as he had then. He'd never minded making a woman a little nervous, but there was a shadow in her eye that said it was more than that, and he was a gentleman. "Mind if I stack it in the living room until after we eat?"

"No, that's fine." Emma said absently as she turned, bending down to pull the waffle iron from the cabinet as she heard his footsteps retreating.

The instant the front door closed Mary Margaret broke out into giggles and Emma could only groan.

"Don't start, he's just a guest." Emma tossed over her shoulder as she started the iron to heating and grabbed some berries to wash.

"I'm sorry, it's just, that was so cute." The petite woman said, still smiling hugely. She looked like a proud parent. "You were flirting."

"No, I..." Emma's protest died on her lips as she realized that yes, she... they, had been. And she had been enjoying it until the instinctive flash of nerves.

"It's okay to like him, sweetie." Mary Margaret said understandingly, seeing the fear flash over her friend's face. She was one of the few people who knew enough about Emma's past to understand why she avoided romantic relationships. And why it took her so long to open up and make friends, why it took her so long to trust.

Emma took a moment to just breath, Leo catching her eye as he started to wake. The baby would be the perfect distraction to keep her thoughts from turning to the writer who for reasons she couldn't understand was just incredibly appealing. And it was more than just his looks. "I'll watch Leo."

Mary Margaret shook her head sadly, knowing better than to push Emma. "It's just for around four hours, David gets off at two today and promised he'd drive right out."

"It's okay, Mary Margaret, I don't mind. It just reminds me of..."

"I know." She rose when Emma trailed off, eyes flicking towards the living room as they heard her guest come in, the thump of a box of books hitting the ground, and then the door closing again. "I'll go get Leo's stuff from the car, and thanks."

"You can stay for waffles if you have time."

It was a peace offering and they both knew it, a way for Emma to say she wasn't upset with her friend's gentle encouragement without coming out and talking about it more. It was the way she communicated, and something all her friends had gotten used to.

"I don't, sorry, I have to be to the school in about fifteen minutes for the teacher's meeting." Mary Margaret truly did regret it. She had a serious weakness for Granny's waffles, she must have eaten hundreds of them while she was pregnant. Automatically adjusting the harness holding her baby against her chest as she crossed the kitchen, she checked to make sure Killian wasn't in hearing distance before turning back to Emma and saying softly, "Just give him a chance, Emma. He seems like a nice guy."

"You saw us talking for all of two minutes." Emma huffed as she cut strawberries maybe a little too forcefully.

"And I'm a good judge of character." Mary Margaret reminded her, not bragging but simply being honest.

"You did meet Walsh for five minutes and tell me he seemed like an ass."

"And I'm telling you Killian seems nice." The brunette grinned, not the kind to add insult to injury by reminding her friend just how right she'd been on the whole Walsh count. "And he totally checks you out when you're not looking."

Emma spun to her, eyes wide, but Mary Margaret merely grinned impishly at her and slid from the room, singing softly to her son as he began to wake further, cooing at her.

"I'm almost afraid to ask around here, but do you need a hand, lass?"

Balancing a pie in one hand, Mary Margaret turned from trying to pull the diaper bag out from where it had gotten wedged between the van's seats and smiled at the man who had immediately insisted she call him Killian. He had just passed a test she hadn't even realized she was

giving him; he wasn't just considerate of Emma because he was attracted to her. Because Emma had mentioned that she worked with her husband David when she'd introduced them, and he was still being nice and offering to help. And doing it with humor no less.

"That would be great." She smiled, easily setting the pie on top of the box of books he was already carrying before managing to un-wedge the oversized diaper bag. And in exactly the same friendly tone, said softly, "Don't hurt her."

Killian almost tripped at the casual delivery of the blunt statement, eyeing her as she came to a stop beside him, absently stroking over her son's back. He thought of his earlier musings, of the flickers of fear and hurt he'd seen, and decided to be equally blunt. "So I was right in guessing that someone did."

Her eyebrow rose at the softness in his voice, and she thought of the way he'd so easily switched gears earlier when Emma abruptly stopped flirting. She tilted her head, considering him, and was surprised when he spoke again.

"I'm a writer, Mary Margaret, we're natural observers. And I've seen the look in her eyes before, I know what it means." Killian said just as quietly, moving them once again towards the house. He hadn't been lying when he said the boxes were heavy, and damp weather always made his left hand ache. He could feel her eyes studying him as she pulled the door open, and he nodded his thanks as he stacked the box on top of two others before handing her what looked like a blueberry pie.

"I'm hoping I'll be sampling that tonight, it smells delicious."

Mary Margaret smiled at him as she took the pie, both of them knowing they couldn't continue their previous conversation within Emma's hearing. "Granny orders dessert from the bakery in town every few days, bread as well. Just like every Friday they all go to her restaurant for the fish fry."

"Support other local businesses." Killian understood easily, giving her a nod as she crossed towards the kitchen with her load.

"Exactly." She winked at him before vanishing around the corner, and he headed back out to finish unloading. He had just grabbed the last two bags from the trunk when Mary Margaret came back out, and he could see her mind still working as she again stopped and considered him. He only gazed back at her, and after a moment he saw her come to some sort of decision.

"You're right that she's been hurt, and of course that's her story to tell. But my first instincts with people are usually good, and I think you're a good guy, so I'm just going to say this." Mary Margaret glanced back at the house, making sure Emma hadn't followed her out for some reason, before saying softly, "It's hard for her to trust, and she'd rather have the truth than anything else. Oh, and don't make promises unless you intend to keep them."

"I always keep my word, and the truth always wins over an easy lie." He didn't take offense, in fact something in him was glad that Emma

had friends looking out for her. And he wasn't sure he would classify himself as a good guy in general, but in the way that she meant it he certainly was. He had never lied or misrepresented anything to get a lass into his bed, and he wasn't about to start with one that fascinated him in the way she did.

"And I'm the opposite of Emma. I trust someone until they give me a reason not to."

They exchanged nods and did the standard it was a pleasure to meet you and I hope I see you again exchange as well before she drove off.

Killian stood musing on that development for a long moment before giving himself a mental shake, heading back into the house with the last two bags. He judged it had been just about ten minutes, and sure enough she was just turning off the iron when he walked into the kitchen.

"The dining room is through there, " She pointed towards the other door out of the kitchen, "I can bring everything in and..."

"You don't have to bother with all that, lass. Unless you'd rather I not be in the kitchen with you." He deliberately kept his voice easy when he saw her mask still in place.

"No, it's okay." She smiled as she set up a second place-setting across from the first at the table.

It was her company smile, Killian saw that at once, and so he kept things light as they began to eat, telling her an amusing story about two of the passengers on his most recent flight, which easily flowed into other travel stories, all amusing now although some had been bloody frustrating at the time.

She didn't tell stories in return, but he could see her genuine amusement in his, and at this point every smile and laugh he got out of her he considered a victory. He had a feeling she had had far too few reasons to smile in her life. More than that, she was relaxing, losing the stiffness that had come with the flash of fear and was just being herself. He was careful to keep it friendly and not flirty, and was rewarded with the same hints of wit and sarcasm that were part of her fascination to him.

When they were done eating, he gave her a cheeky grin and offered to help with the dishes.

"Guests never help out with the work."

He heard the same measured tone in her voice that he had heard earlier when she and her friend spoke together, and guessed she was quoting Granny. He lowered his head as again he felt her pushing him away, he'd hoped she would understand the gesture. A second later his head snapped up in surprise when she spoke again.

"But under the circumstances, sure, and after I'll help you get all your things upstairs."

His grin grew as he nodded, she had understood and accepted his peace offering after all, and he rose to help her clear the empty plates



from the table. If just this first meal was any indication, he was going to have to see if there was a gym in town. He paused as he set the plates on the counter and his eyes fell on his gloved left hand. He waited with dread for the question of if he wanted to wash or dry, but she surprised him again by simply passing him a dishtowel as she turned the water on. "We have a dishwasher, but it's on the fritz. Repairman is supposed to be out later today."

"Want me to take a look at it?"

"Are you offering because you actually know anything about dishwashers, or because as a man you think you should?"

Killian chuckled, glad she was still relaxed enough to tease him. "I know enough to fix a few of the common problems, although..." He tilted his head to study the front of the dishwasher as she scrubbed at the waffle iron. "Just how old is this unit?"

"Non-stick, my ass." Emma mumbled before flushing. "Sorry, um, probably about as old as we are."

He laughed out loud this time. "I'm hardly offended by such language, lass. Although I'm surprised to hear it from a small town girl." Something flashed in her eyes, and he realized he'd inadvertently touched on something personal. His first guess was that she wasn't from around here, now that he thought about it her accent was discernibly different from Mary Margaret's, the only other person he'd talked to in this area. So one of them wasn't local, well, possibly both of them but certainly at least one.

But she clearly didn't want to talk about it, so he went back to looking at the dishwasher as he absently began drying the iron as she passed it to him. "If it's that old I doubt what I know would be of much use." He moved to put the iron in the cabinet he'd watched her take it from earlier, watching her eyes flick briefly to the black glove on his hand before looking away. But all she commented on was that he had a good memory.

He'd had his coat and both gloves on when Mary Margaret was here, so she hadn't noticed anything, but there was no way Emma hadn't noticed by now. And he was living here, she was going to see sooner or later as the bloody glove got uncomfortable, especially when it was this humid, if he left it on for too long. As he took a plate from her, he said softly, "I'm surprised you haven't asked by now."

Emma caught his eyes, and he saw something there, a fragile trust he hoped was due to him proving his willingness to not push her. Her words were barely audible over the running water as she said softly, "When you ask people questions they tend to ask them in return."

"I'm fascinated by questions. Theories, puzzles. Comes with the job." Killian answered, his voice not much louder. "You have to understand people to write about them. But you have to let them tell you in their own time."

Emma's eyes softened just a tad more, and he hoped she understood what he was saying. He finished drying the last plate, stacking it with the others on the counter for her to put away, and hung the towel on a peg. It was the very fact that she hadn't asked, or even

stared as did most people who were too polite to ask outright, that made him say softly, "It was a fire. I still have mostly full range of motion, it's just not a pretty sight."

His voice was matter of fact, emotionless, but Emma knew that was often the easiest way to tell painful stories, and she could see the loss in his eyes. Her thoughts flashed back to the incident Granny had mentioned last night, remembering the details, at least how the press had reported them. She didn't exactly stay up to date on Hollywood gossip, and actually found it slightly rude that Granny had googled him, though in retrospect she supposed she should just be glad David or Graham hadn't run a full background check on the guy she would be alone with. She'd thought it was kind of rude, but it did help her understand now.

It wasn't the damage to his hand that was the cause of the hurt she saw shimmering in the depths of the blue eyes that had darkened noticeably, it was the fact that he'd lost the woman he loved in that fire as well. And for a brief time been suspected of both her murder and arson, although he'd been found completely innocent of all charges. The fire had been ruled accidental, as had her death in it. But nothing had mentioned lasting damage to his hand, and she could completely understand why. Her own scars were on the inside, but she hid them as well.

"Whatever you're comfortable with." She said with compassion in her voice, careful to keep out any trace of pity. She knew he wouldn't want that. "It won't bother me either way."

He nodded and was just about to say something when a baby's wail came from the monitor sitting on the counter.

"I've gotta get him, sorry, I'll help you with the boxes as soon as I get him his lunch."

"Don't worry about it, lass, I've got them." Killian said as she opened the third door leading from the kitchen, the one he'd wondered about as it seemed an addition, and he saw it led into a living room, this one even more personalized and cozy and clearly belonging to the absent Granny. She came back with Leo balanced in her arms, the boy already quieting as she sang to him, the same soft lullaby he'd heard her friend sing earlier.

"No, a deal's a deal."

Killian remembered what Mary Margaret had said about not breaking promises to her, and even as minor as this was he figured it counted. "I think I'll have another cup of tea."

She smiled at him again, and he went back to telling her funny stories, considering it a huge step when she told him one in return. And not wanting to derail all the progress he seemed to be making, he refrained from saying aloud that she looked even hotter than normal as with surprising ease she helped him tote all his books up to his room after setting up a collapsible playpen in the main living room. Leo was obviously a frequent guest, yet he wondered at the sadness that would sometimes come into Emma's eyes when she looked down at him.

After checking if he needed anything else, she left him to unpack,

and once again he found his thoughts drifting for a long time after he'd closed the door behind her, wondering at all the sadness in her eyes. He'd been telling the complete truth that questions, and just people in general, had always fascinated him, but he'd also meant it that he didn't push people.

And just the few small ways she'd already opened up to him told Killian that was definitely the right approach here. He only had eight weeks until his deadline, and he really couldn't afford to get distracted by his landlady, but he wasn't sure there was a way to stop that now. She fascinated him at every turn, touching more than his hormones for the first time since he'd lost Milah. He knew his first love would want him to be happy, he would have wanted the same for her, but knowing that and acting on it were two different things. But this was the first time he'd even wanted to try, and surely that meant something.

Though it wouldn't matter anyway if he couldn't convince Emma that he would never intentionally hurt her. With a sigh, he let her face flit through his mind as he started unpacking, wondering how he could earn her trust. And wondering why it mattered to him so damn much that he did.

TBC...

### 3. Chapter 3

Disclaimer: I do not in anyway own Once Upon A Time. ABC, Disney, A&E, and whoever else have that distinction. All opening chapter quotes are from "Till I Found You" by Freestyle. No profit is being made, and no copywrite infringement is intended.

AN: I'm having so much fun with this and I'm glad you are as well. Oh, and as is common in CS AU, I'm playing with ages for a few people to make things work. And I did make one huge change to one of the backstories so that even you guys don't know everything that's coming. Hopefully no one will be too upset by it when we get there.

\* \* \*

><p>Until I Found You<p>

by Lady Callista

\_OoOoOoO\_

\_"\_\_I learned to rely on myself\_\_ a\_\_nd I thought that I was doin' well\_

\_Until you came with something \_\_I just can't deny.\_\_"\_

\_OoOoOoO\_

Chapter 3:

They settled fairly easily into a routine, Emma adjusting hers as needed to accommodate her guest.

He'd told her about the deadline he was under, and wondered if meals had to be at a set time, because when he got lost in his work and it was going well he wasn't about to surface for something as mundane as food, as delicious as hers was. She'd blushed and mumbled that they were all Granny's recipes, and told him that his timetable was hers, as many of Granny's meals were designed to be quick yet delicious, and it seemed he would eat anything.

He had murmured that a good recipe still needed a good cook, and excused himself as her blush deepened.

He went out in the mornings, driving into town or the areas around it, gathering what he called local color and flavor for his script, and spent most afternoons writing. At least that's what she assumed he did locked in his room.

He took most of his meals at the inn, and was always friendly, telling her funny stories as they ate about various places he had traveled and people he had met, and there was nothing he didn't want to know about in return. But he always kept it light, retreating at the first sign that he had accidentally gotten too personal.

Emma found herself both able to relax into his easy company while wondering why he had stopped flirting with her. She should have been glad, and she was, but...but part of her was disappointed. She tried not to examine that part of herself too closely.

"Did I lose you, love?"

Killian's words abruptly pulled her from her thoughts, and she looked up from her nearly empty plate and tried to rewind her mind for a minute. He'd been telling her something about running into Mary Margaret at Cafe Aurora, but she'd been too lost in her thoughts to follow more than that. "Sorry, guess I was daydreaming for a minute there."

"That's alright." Killian said easily, "I was just saying that Mary Margaret wanted you to give her a ring when you have a chance, something about if you could watch Leo for a few hours one night or other."

"Oh, um, yeah I'll call her."

He saw that twinge of sadness in her eyes again, it seemed to always pop up when she talked about the lad, yet he couldn't understand it as she clearly loved both him and his parents. Trying to lighten the atmosphere, he asked, "I've been meaning to ask, is Leo a nickname for something?"

Emma chuckled, wondering how he always knew when to redirect the conversation. "Leopold, but you'll never hear anyone use it. It was Mary Margaret's father's name and she had her heart set on it, but David was really worried about how outdated it was, you know, the kids making fun of him and stuff. The compromise was that they would only call him Leopold, well, I guess you could say in private."

"And I thought Killian was bad." He chuckled as she rose and started clearing the plates, having to check himself from offering to help her. She'd allowed it as part of their deal that first morning, but

for the three following days had insisted on Granny's rule that he was a guest and guests didn't help with the work. He still found it slightly strange to know that, since she did his laundry as well, she already knew if he wore boxer or briefs.

"I'd actually never heard it before."

"It's certainly not common." He agreed. "A bit more so back home than here, though there it's usually spelled with a C. My mum was a bit of a rebel."

She caught the past tense, but reminded herself that asking questions meant people expected you to answer them in return. He had actually been amazing about not asking the wrong one though, being true to his word on waiting for her to talk in her own time. It was part of what made her so comfortable around him, yet at the same time made it harder for her to ignore her attraction to him. Or the fact that it was growing. She kept her mind on that, refusing to let thoughts of her own unknown mother surface. She would never know why she had been named Emma Swan.

She was saved from having to say anything by the phone ringing, and she crossed to the counter to snag it. "Lucas Manor, how can I help you? Oh, hey Graham."

Killian finished off his lunch as she talked, casting about in his memory until he placed the name as the town's sheriff, both her friend and her boss.

"So... there might be a problem with dinner tonight." Emma turned back to him after hanging up the phone. "That was my boss at the sheriff's office. He needs to be at the town council meeting tonight, but David and Philip are both out with the flu. Which wouldn't be a problem except he just had to arrest a drunk and disorderly, which means someone needs to be at the station to babysit him until he sleeps it off."

"Is it inappropriate to be impressed that someone was that drunk at 1 in the afternoon?"

"His name's Wil, and he's taking his fiancée leaving town with another guy pretty hard."

All traces of humor left his face at the softness in her tone. He wasn't sure she was aware of it, but her mask had dropped completely, and he saw the understanding and compassion in her eyes. It didn't take a genius to figure out how she had been hurt. At least one of the ways, for he now suspected they were multiple. But she'd made it clear that anything that happened before she moved to Storybrooke was off limits. She wouldn't even discuss where she'd come from or why she had moved here.

"It's hard to lose someone you love." He offered gently, rising and approaching her slowly, letting her see his understanding of it as well. "I know that firsthand, and I'm thinking you do as well."

"No, I've never been in love."

Her mask and walls were back up in an instant, and rather than push he just continued softly, "I imagine you know this, it was all over

the bloody press, but I lost my fiancée in the same fire that damaged my hand and arm. I'll admit I fell into the bottle for a while after that, which somehow mostly stayed out of the press, thankfully."

"It's easier when you don't have to think about it."

She whispered the words, almost absently, and again something in the way he was opening up to her made him get to watch her walls slide down again. Trying to maintain the fragile openness, he offered, "But it's worse as well, because when you wake up nothing's different except you're paying the piper on top of all your other pains."

"But for a while you get to forget, for a while it doesn't hurt." Emma flushed when he raised a knowing eyebrow, she hadn't even meant to say that, and stuttered, "I mean, everyone has things they want to forget, and..."

"And we're getting distracted, my apologies." He once again backed away, "What time would you need to be in town to babysit Romeo?"

"From 5 till about 8, and also I didn't think I'd need my car for the day, and a friend had some family drama, so I let her borrow it to get out of town. I mean, I can get a ride with someone, it won't be hard, but I'd either have to do dinner really early or really late, and..."

"I can drive you into town, love, it's not a problem." He interrupted, and seeing a way to solve two problems at once added, "And I can bring take-out from Granny's to the station, I've yet to have anything but breakfast there."

"I couldn't possibly ask you to change your schedule, I'll just..."

"Emma." He said her name rarely, generally just calling her lass or love as he did most women, a habit he'd grown up with as his brother had done it as well. That meant her name was all the more effective when he said it softly, and she broke off at once as he continued, "I don't have a schedule, not the way you're thinking, and I was planning on checking out more of the town tonight anyway. The pub was empty during the day, I'm hoping it will have a bit more atmosphere tonight."

"It's not bad." Emma replied, taking a deep breath. The offer really did make things easier, solving both problems at once, and he seemed completely truthful that it didn't inconvenience him. "And okay, sure, thanks. We should leave about quarter to five."

He nodded, "I'll be in my room, writing, until then. But it's actually been going badly the past day or so, which was why I planned on going out tonight. Sometimes I just need to stop thinking too hard and live a little."

She heard the double meaning in the words, and remembered both Ruby and Mary Margaret basically telling her the same thing. He was only going to be here for eight, well, seven and a half weeks now, so she wasn't going into this with expectations of a boyfriend or anything more. But a spring fling, a lover for more than a single night, now

that could be fun. Just like he was fun, and funny. He was cheeky yet respectful. He was sweet, and nice, but there was just that slightest hint in his eyes sometimes that he could be dark and dangerous as well. Every new facet made her more intrigued, and, well, there was nothing wrong with how he looked either. And it wasn't like she was risking her heart again, she was just having fun for a few months.

Before she could chicken out, she offered, "If you want, we could both eat at the station, and then go get a drink once Graham is back."

It was on the tip of his tongue to teasingly ask her if she was asking him on a date, but there was a hesitation to her offer that said it could be withdrawn depending on his reaction. It was a lowering of her walls, an offer to spend time with him outside of the interactions caused by their living situation. And he wasn't going to say no to any step forward. "That sounds wonderful, love. So, you're an innkeeper, a cook, a deputy, and a tour guide as well. Is there anything you can't do?"

"I suck at parallel parking."

Killian burst out laughing, always glad when she was comfortable enough with him to just be herself.

"I suck at this, too." She whispered.

He cocked his head, trying to make sure he had heard her correctly, eyes widening in wonder at the sudden blush that rushed to her face. Her facial expressions were shifting almost faster than he could follow, and as she took just the tiniest step forward he realized that maybe she actually was trying to ask him on a date. Or at least a no-pressure version of one. He'd been so bloody busy trying not to flirt with her that he'd completely missed that she was the one trying.

Emma flushed as he only stared at her, glancing down at her feet, suddenly unsure of what to say. She'd never asked a man out on a date, unless it was job related, and his calling her a tour guide had stung more than it should. She startled when his fingers came into her line of vision, but although he gave her ample time she didn't move away as his index finger gently brushed under her chin, urging her to raise her face.

She saw the understanding in his eyes as soon as she met them, and watched as they darkened slightly, her breath hitching as his fingers ghosted along her cheek. She could see a million thoughts running through his mind, and had nearly as many clamoring for attention in her own head, but above all was the relief that he got it. For the first time she felt relief instead of fear at how well he could read her.

"Why now, Emma?"

"Because rather than being happy that you stopped flirting with me, I missed it." She answered honestly, watching his face for signs of ego or machismo. Those were the two things she had completely missed spotting in Walsh until it was too late. But he only smiled softly.

"I'm a patient man, love." Killian shifted a fraction closer to her. "I'd rather be friends with my landlady than have her annoyed at me, or worse, nervous around me. And I'd rather she tell me to sod off than lie to me."

Emma took a deep breath, but she knew what he meant. She had to close her eyes, had to look away from the intensity in his eyes, and so was shocked when he spoke softly.

"You're something of an open book, love, and I know what the look in your eyes means. I know what it is to be alone and betrayed. And some of the things you've said, or, well... for someone who claims to have never been in love, you often seem to know a great deal about it."

"Maybe I was in love, once." Emma said softly. "I've got to do some work in the greenhouse, I'll see you at quarter to five."

"It's a date." Killian said the words just as softly, and was rewarded with a small smile before she fled the room.

OoOoO A few hours later OoOoO

Killian had dropped her at the station at five, needing to grab some books from the library before it closed and promising to return at six with dinner. As there was nothing from Granny's she didn't like, she'd told him to surprise her, curious as to how he would react. He'd only grinned and nodded before driving away.

She'd sat at the outer desk for the first thirty minutes, arguing with herself over what the hell she was doing. But for the first time in a long time, the nerves were more anticipation than fear.

"I'm being an idiot." Emma grumbled to herself as she stood in the small women's room of the station, doing her make-up in the tiny mirror. She'd spent nearly a half hour picking her outfit, something she also berated herself for as she normally grabbed the first shirt she found when reaching in the closet.

He'd seen her in pajamas and old gardening t-shirts. He'd seen her with no make-up and her hair in a ratty ponytail. Because of their current living arrangement it was like they were doing things backwards. He'd never seen her in a dress though, or with full make-up and an up-do.

It was almost six now, and she rushed from the bathroom, stuffing her emergency make-up bag back into a desk drawer. It was the first time she'd used it since Ruby forced it on her.

She stopped for a moment, wondering how Ruby was doing. She hadn't called yet, but Granny had texted a few times with smiley faces, so Emma hoped the away time had been exactly what Ruby needed. She jerked out of her thoughts at a staccato rap on the door.

Who knocked on the office door when the station was open, she wondered as she crossed to open it. It occurred to her partway there that his hands were probably full of take-out, and she hurried to pull the door open.



He stood in the doorway with a huge grin on his face, the bag of food dangling from his bad hand and a single red rose held up in his right.

Emma's heart clenched as she realized he was the first man to ever bring her a flower, and fast on the heels of that she realized what he was doing. She realized why he had knocked, and still now wasn't coming in. She realized he had somehow changed as well. Her dress had been hidden in her backpack, thankfully it didn't wrinkle, but she didn't know where the black dress pants or deep blue dress-shirt had come from. It perfectly matched his eyes and for a moment all she could do was stare.

Despite how unconventional it was, he was treating this like a real, proper first date.

Emma took the rose from him, feeling herself blush as his eyes left her face for the first time. She saw his adam's apple bob, jaw clenching as he swallowed harshly, taking in the simple yet sexy black dress she wore. His eyes returned to her face sooner than she'd expected, and the admiration was clear in his voice as he said softly, "You look stunning, Emma. May I?"

His eyes were darker, tinged with attraction and more, and it was her turn to take a deep breath as he reached for her hand. She didn't understand what he was asking, but she gave him her hand automatically, nodding, caught in the spell of his eyes.

Killian brought her hand up to his lips, ghosting a kiss over her knuckles, lingering for just a second longer when he saw the mix of surprise and desire in her eyes. And then the fear flicked in and he dropped her hand quickly, for the first time worried at how silent she was being. "Lass, this doesn't have to be..."

"No, it's just..." She paused and he damn near held his breath, hoping she wouldn't retreat behind her mask. His patience, both now and over the past few days, was rewarded as he saw the last of the mask slip away, and he knew how big a step this was for her as she continued softly, "It's just that no one has ever..."

Her gaze dropped to the rose, both her hands now fidgeting with the stem, and he tried to figure out if she meant no one had ever brought her flowers or no one had ever kissed her hand. The second wasn't entirely unlikely in this country, but if it was the first as well he could only shake his head, wondering who in the hell she had been dating. Wondering who she had been in love with, if he'd never even brought her flowers. But he said only, "You deserve to be spoiled, and if you haven't noticed I'm a gentleman."

"I have noticed." She whispered as she stepped back. "Thank you, Killian. Come in."

The sincerity that still held surprise made his heart hurt for her, and he forced his thoughts away from whatever man had hurt her, not wanting her thinking of the prat either. And so he teased as he moved past her, "Do you always invite gentlemen in on the first date?"

The teasing banter was easy to fall back into, it was already familiar and safe. And fun. But she heard the tones of other questions in his voice and replied with a grin, "No, but these are

rather abnormal circumstances."

"Well, where's the fun in being normal?" He grinned as he followed her back through the open space and set the bag on the desk she'd obviously cleared.

"So, what am I having for dinner?" Emma grinned back as she ducked into the sheriff's office to grab a second desk chair.

"Well, there was this spinach and tofu salad..." He managed to keep a straight face for all of five seconds before he burst out laughing at the horror on her face.

"Not nice." She gave him a light smack upside the back of the head as she passed him to open the bag, and he only laughed harder. "You're lucky I can already smell the onion rings, or..."

Emma trailed off as she pulled the take-out boxes from the bag, grabbing a stray onion ring from the bottom of the bag as she did so and popping it into her mouth. She was glad she had done so when she opened the box to find her favorite comfort food, grilled cheese, because it gave her a second before she had to speak. There was just something about Granny's grill and types of cheeses that never tasted quite the same at home. "How did you know?"

Killian chuckled as he sat down next to her, tossing his coat over the back of the chair and taking the other container as she passed it to him. He wanted to tease her further, but knowing how nervous it made her that he could read her so well, he said easily, "You're a regular there, love. It wasn't hard to ask the waitress what your favorite order was."

She chuckled as well then, saying softly, "Hard, no. But most people wouldn't have thought of it."

"I'm not most people, love." He said it easily, but with a seriousness in his eyes that easily conveyed his double message.

"I believe that." She said softly before leaning back, grinning as he opened his own box and she saw his eyes widen. "You know how they say never get barbecue or spaghetti or stuff like that on a first date? Well, that might be worse."

"The lass recommended it, and they say you can always tell a place by their special."

Emma laughed. You could indeed, and with an oversized bun, three huge patties and four strips of bacon, not the mention the cheese, lettuce, tomato, pickle, onion and four, count them four condiments, Granny's Special Burger showed the woman's sense of humor.

It was absolutely delicious, and absolutely impossible to eat without making a mess. It was the kind of thing you ordered to go and then took home to eat alone. With a fork and a bib. And knowing her friends, and realizing that it would have been the same waitress who he asked about her favorite, so they would have known he was eating with her, she managed to stop laughing at the daunted look on his face enough to ask, "Blonde, brunette, or red-head?" She knew that with Granny and Ruby both gone, several people who had worked there in the past were helping to fill in, and she wasn't sure who was on

tonight.

"Cute blonde, about your size and height, with a wedding ring and no other jewelry. Didn't have a name-tag."

Knowing his attention to detail, and having a prime suspect just from that, Emma asked, "Did she call you sweetie?"

Killian nodded, realizing he'd been had from the look on her face. But rather than taking offense he was amused. "She did."

Emma laughed again. "That's Ella, she quit about a year ago when she had a baby, she's just filling in with Ruby gone. I'll have to find a way to thank her. It really is delicious though, if a bit messy."

Given that the instant he picked up the burger sauce began dripping from it, he believed the messy part. The amusement faded as he realized that while it was a good joke normally, it posed a particular problem for him that Emma's friend couldn't have foreseen. Yet he tried to hide his discomfort, wanting to keep the smile on her face. He put the burger down and tried to be casual as he reached into the large bag of onion rings to swipe a few. "These are apparently to die for as well."

Emma stopped laughing, catching a hint of something in his voice that sounded forced, and she looked up from her first bite of grilled cheese to see that when he'd grabbed the rings he had taken some napkins from the bag as well and was trying, below the desk, to subtly wipe a mix of sauces from his black leather glove.

Despite him telling her of it the first morning, he'd never taken off the glove around her, and her eyes filled with understanding as she reached out, taking the gloved hand in both of her own.

He froze, but didn't speak, as she matter-of-factly took the napkins and turned his hand until she'd gotten the glove cleaned off. She squeezed his hand ever so lightly, dropping it immediately when he jerked. "Sorry, did I... I didn't..."

"It doesn't hurt, lass, if that's your worry." He said softly, eyes still down. "It's more foreign than anything else, no one ever really... I mean the doctors, and myself, but..."

"I meant it that I don't care, Killian." She said just as quietly. She understood though, and since she had always been better with actions than words, added, "But if you want we can split the grilled cheese now, then grab snacks at The Rabbit Hole if we get hungry later."

"I thought to myself, the morning I told you, that with our living circumstances you would see it sooner or later. The glove gets bloody uncomfortable at times, and cuts down on what dexterity I do have. But then every time I tried to head down to a meal without it on..."

She didn't say anything, but pushed the box of grilled cheese closer to him.

Her eyes widened when his response was to take a deep breath and

unbutton the cuff on his left wrist. He held out the right to her without looking, and she unbuttoned it without comment, watching as he rolled up the sleeves of the shirt to his elbows. She could see the damage already on his forearm, although it wasn't that bad, just paler than the rest of his skin and with that weird texture and shininess that she'd seen on TV but never in person.

She also noticed the tattoo on his right inner forearm, fire burning around a heart, a ribbon wrapped around it bearing a name she remembered from the news articles. "Milah."

Killian froze as she reached out to touch the ink lightly, he'd been so preoccupied with his burned hand that he had, for a minute, forgotten that rolling up his sleeves to keep them out of the sauce would display that as well. It wasn't like she didn't know he had been in love, but he knew that seeing a reminder of it firsthand, especially when they were on an already tentative first date, had to be a shock. Instead of removing his glove his eyes flicked up to hers, trying to judge her reaction.

To his utter shock, there was only compassion in her eyes, and he knew his own widened as she reached up and pulled on the chain she wore around her neck. He'd noticed it was always there, but whatever pendant was on it was always hidden under her shirt. Even now, though her black dress was rather short, it was very modest in front, and realizing that this was very important to her he tried not to get distracted by the hints of cleavage that were displayed as she slowly pulled the pendant out, leaning closer so he could see it.

It was a round disc, not much larger than a quarter, gold and brown with a rough image of a swan.

"His name was Neal, and he didn't die, he just left."

It was all she said, tucking the pendant away again before leaning back and continuing to eat. It was a huge step, and one she obviously had said all she was going to about for now. But she had said that much, she had opened up that tiny bit. And he appreciated her casualness as he prepared again to remove the glove. She wasn't acting like this was the big moment they both knew it was, because while from his side it was, if she was being truthful about it not mattering, and he believed she was, then this really wasn't a big moment to her. Other than seeing whether or not he would trust her, and she couldn't act like that mattered too much.

He took a deep breath and pulled off the glove, tucking it back into his jacket pocket before picking up the burger and diving in.

Killian caught her eyes as they flicked to his hand, amazed when he saw compassion rather than disgust, and grateful there was no trace of pity. He'd just managed to take his first bite when the middle patty slid out of the bun and landed on the desk with a plop.

They both laughed, and the easy banter started up again as if it had never stopped.

They were still sitting there, chatting and laughing, two hours later when Graham came in, tossing his jacket at the hook on the wall and hitting it more through repetition and luck than skill.

A quick round of introductions followed, and Emma teased Graham that he was back just in time as she heard the first moans start to come from the cell. She ignored the considering looks Graham kept making between her and Killian, mouthing to him behind Killian's back to mind his own business.

Within minutes Emma and Killian were slipping into their jackets and heading out into the night.

TBC...

End  
file.